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Elvis' New Image

Two different views of the recent Presley TV spectacular

He's become a 'real' person

By DANE LANKEN

The Elvis Presley of the sixties was not the Elvis we knew in the fifties. The original blues and hard-rock-wailing, hip-gyrating hero of whom parents could so condescendingly disapprove, was straigthened out during his army stint at the turn of the decade. What emerged was the clean-cut, all-American family entertainer that sang scores of inane songs, starred in two dozen inane movies, and continued to earn an annual income of five million dollars.

But then in the past couple of years, things began to slip. Movie receipts started to fall, the Elvis's songs were no longer making the top ten. Elvis, who had exploded on the scene just a decade ago by giving kids a solid image with which to identify, was quickly becoming removed from the masses who made him The King.

The beautiful story of the poor truck driver who made good by singing wild songs and making obscene movements had lost it meaning. The influx of British pop stars, who had much longer hair and who sang far more explicit lyrics, forced Elvis to retreat to the status of an innocuous family entertainer.

Safe behind the electrified gates of his Memphis or Bel-Air mansions, guarded from his admirers by a collection of his old buddies, the Memphis Mafia, and with his every word and move controlled by his Maker, Colonel Tom Parker, Elvis was losing touch. Fans who remembered him from the fifties were getting older, and growing out of the major record-buying age brackets. Younger fans of pop music, whose tastes were molded in the Beatle and post-Beatle era, little with which to relate in the faceless superman into which Elvis had developed.

Obviously, it was time to remake Elvis' image. No one could have been more aware of that than former carnival barker himself. The Colonel, the cigar-chomping, slovenly, semi-illiterate entrepreneurial genius, who made his first twenty million dollars peddling the last of the great patent medicines — Louisiana Senator Dudley Le Blanc's Hadacol cough syrup, must have been the first to realize this.

And consequently, the Elvis television special was arranged. Elvis, who hadn't made a public appearance in ten years or been seen on TV in eight, filled the screen for a full hour Tuesday night, showing millions of Americans that Elvis has changed again. And the change is significant — Elvis' new image is Elvis' old image!

The whole show was evidently directed at re-establishing Elvis as a pop star with a personality, and more important, a personality and style that is sufficiently unorthodox to attract young fans, just like it did twelve years ago. Elvis has re-grown his hair and long sideburns; he shakes and gyrates just like everybody knew he was doing when Ed Sullivan wouldn't let us see it in the old days, and most important, he sings good songs again.

On Tuesday, there were none of those banal ballads that we've been getting from Elvis in the sixties, and that have been filling up all his silly movies. The songs were either early Elvis hits, or in that tradition; or else they were ballads that contained more than the usual amount of poetic and musical value!

He sang Hound Dog and Trouble and Running and Hiding — all basic blues-rock he hasn't tried since his pre-army days.

The style of the show also indicated an attempt to 'humanize' Elvis. A major part involved Elvis just sitting in the middle of a bunch of people (albeit a bunch of dumb girls) and musicians, and dumb girls) od musicians, and just singing and playing very naturally. He did very human, very natural things, like wiping his nose with his thumb. Best of all, he showed that he could laugh at himself. And a lot of people had their faith and respect in The King restored. They were reminded that the basis for Elvis' fantastic success is simply that he's a good singer and a good performer; and that given a chance, he can prove that he's also a 'real' person.

Obviously, tastes and styles have changed in ten years. And just because someone appealed to certain audiences once, there's no guarantee he will appeal to a new and different audience ten years later. But on his Tuesday night special, Elvis demonstrated that he still has all the talent and style that could enable him to mesmerize millions of ans again.

He's strictly small-town stuff

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ

Elvis Presley looked embarrassed as he twitched his lips and sang You Ain't Nothin' But A Hound Dog on his hour-long television spectacular a few nights ago. It was the first time Elvis had performed before a live audience in ten years. And although he valiently tried to recreate the spirit he evoked twelve years ago, it was clear from the outset that he just wasn't going to succeed.

One could still recognize Elvis as Elvis. There is something about that delinquent poker-face of his that is quite unforgettable. Nevertheless, he looked as if he had been taking years of facials from Madame Tussaud. His body is still trim and perfect. But it didn't move like the Presley of Old. He was stiff. He didn't really swing to his music anymore. He flailed his arms slightly out of time with the beat. After every song he was out of breath and it seemed a great effort for him to recover in time for the next number. Elvis is thirty-three.

"I wanna say a few words about music," he said sincerely. "Very few words," he added jokingly. Then, the killer: "You know, music has changed quite a lot during the past ten or twelve years . . ." He went on to say how much he enjoyed the "new" groups, such as the Beatles, but he maintained that real rock 'n' roll music was still based on "gospel and rhythm 'n' blues". His terminology may not quite be correct, but Elvis is right. However, that kind of talk was a little hard to take from Elvis, because most of his records of the past few years have been totally divorced from these roots.

In his best years, Elvis' unique style — the grunt, the swivel hips — was exciting. The music was simple and primeval, and it conveyed a message that was very real. When he sung Heartbreak Hotel you know he really meant it. Jailhouse Rock was quite plausible, because somehow you could just picture Elvis walking down a dark alley, brass knuckles in hand. The realities that were implicit in his music soon disappeared when he started making movies. The movies, always made as a showcase for Elvis, marked the downfall of Presley the rock singer. Now the songs were written around the plot of the film, and since Elvis can't act for beans, the plots were inane. Thus, the music was inane. Gradually, Elvis lost touch with the music that he made popular.

Today, the new breed of record listeners admires authenticity in pop music. So, when the current fetish for Getting Back To The Basics came into vogue, Elvis Presley was missing. He put out a few records that were stereotyped imitations of old glory. Now, the grunts are hollow, the hips quiver faintly rather than swivel. Elvis sounds phony.

Presley is still enormously popular in many small-towns in America. Small-town fans are still excited by his manoeuvers. You could see them on television in the audience, in their home permanents and white dresses, squirming with delight that Elvis had returned. For the "sophisticated" pop audience, though, Elvis is no longer enough. The Rolling Stones have taken over Elvis' long-lost role as emotional catalysts. Their lyrics are explicitly sexual and explosive; their music, still based on rhythm 'n' blues, is raunchy and exciting. When the Stones' Street Fighting Man was released around the time of the Chicago convention, many radio stations refused to play it on the grounds that it was "revolutionary". Parents used to say that sort of thing about Elvis, but they can't now.

Put it this way: Elvis Presley made his movies with Hal Wallis; the Rolling Stones make theirs with Jean-Luc Godard.

The Montreal Morality Squad visits Sir George Williams University

Peter, Paul and Mary bring their unique brand of musical entertainment to the Salle Wilfrid Pelletier this weekend. They perform this evening and again tomorrow night at 8.30 p.m. The trio is one of the few contemporary musical shows for young people considered acceptable by the Place des Arts management.

By ANDREW GELLER

"You'll never guess what?" a blonde girl was saying, "the morality squad is here."

The scene was the Sir George Williams University theatre. The house was packed.

Half the audience was watching The Feast, a play in which two female characters are nude under black, transparent gowns.

The other half stole looks at two Montreal morality squad officers who stood conspicuously at the back of the hall.

The morality men had notified the cast it would see the second performance for itself after reading the reviews of Wednesday's opening night.

By curtain time, university halls were a-buzz. Was the morality squad really coming? Would the play be shut down? Could police really stop a university play?

At 8:15 p.m., the theatre was filled; no sign of the men. Shortly after 8:30 p.m., the lights dim. Two morality squad officers slip in.

Some students nudged each other incredulously. Others snickered, asking: "Where are their sub-machine guns?"

There were complaints that by standing at the back of the theatre, the morality men were breaking fire regulations. The privilege was denied reporters on these grounds.

Then the first part of the play was over. Nothing happened. The morality squad went to the bathroom.

The second part. The girls appear nude but with long capes, the play goes on.

But the moment of truth is approaching. The cast has been told the two girls could be arrested and the production stopped when the play ends.

"I think it's ridiculous," says Penny, the ticket girl. "We were sold out anyway. Now all these kinky people came to see us."

"The girls don't want to be sensational. They don't think the human body is a dirty thing. They feel deeply that they are doing something artistic."

Everyone waits. The play ends. The moment of truth is at hand.

The morality men confer outside. Under questioning they say the play is all right, but suddenly become tongue-tied. "We just came to catch the act," one officer says.

They refuse to give their names. Finally, they are joined by two other morality men who were seated inside. Cameras arrive and the men leave, grumbling: "We didn't come here to have our pictures taken."

Prof. Alfred Pinsky, chairman of the fine art department commented: "The issue is absolutely absurd. The morality squad would never have been there were it not for the reviews mentinong nudity.

"The play represents innocence, pure and simple, without any kind of obscenity. Most people are nude when they undress. Nudity is not something vile.

"The play calls for the female actors to be less dressed. We modified this."

"He added: "I think that if outmoded laws allow the police to take action, the laws should be changed."

RED AND WHITE REVUE

Auditions for McGill's annual Red and White Revue are being held this weekend. This year's Revue, Odysseus, won't you please come home? will run from February 6 to 15. The show was created entirely by McGill students: Ericka Ritter and Steven Whitzman wrote it; Sooie Cochrane and Leon Aronson composed the music; Howard Ryshpan will direct; Nick Deutsch will conduct; and Tony Evans is the producer.

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